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ABSTRACT

Traditional ideals discourage Japanese women from working outside the home. This study was conducted to explore generational differences in Japanese attitudes toward women's employment and to interpret those differences in terms of social change. Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 900 Japanese men and women. Subjects were classified as being members of either the younger generation (20-39 years of age) or the older generation (40-59 years of age). T-tests were calculated to test for differences between groups. While no significant differences were found for Japanese men, Japanese women were found to differ significantly on 6 of 11 attitude items. Compared with the younger generation, the older generation of Japanese women showed a greater tendency to believe that they could be happy as full-time housewives; that married women should stay home to have and raise children; that maternal employment was likely to harm children's development; and that a mother should not work outside the home when there was a preschool-aged, school-aged, or teenage child in the family. The results suggest that Japanese women's, but not men's, attitudes toward women's employment are changing. To the extent that this leads to greater differences between men and women, Japanese families may experience more stress and conflict related to employment issues. (Author/NB)

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Generational Differences in Japanese Attitudes Toward Women's Employment*

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ABSTRACT

Generational Differences in Japanese Attitudes
Toward Women's Employment

Traditional ideals discourage Japanese women from working outside the home. This study explores generational differences in Japanese attitudes toward women's employment, and interprets differences in terms of social change. Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 900 Japanese men and women. Subjects were divided into two groups: a "younger generation" (20 - 39 year olds) and an "older generation" (40 - 59 year olds); and *t*-tests were calculated to test for differences between groups. While no significant differences were found for Japanese men, Japanese women were found to differ significantly on six of eleven attitude items. Compared with the younger generation, the older generation of Japanese women showed a greater tendency to believe that they could be happy as full-time housewives, that married women should stay home to have and raise children instead of working outside the home, that maternal employment is likely to harm children's development, and that a mother should not work outside the home when there is a preschool-aged, school-aged, or teen-aged child in the family. It appears that Japanese women's, but not men's, attitudes towards women's employment may be changing.

Generational Differences in Japanese Attitudes
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According to traditional Japanese cultural ideals, women should be "good wives and wise mothers." Indeed, girls were trained "to help (her working man) . . . by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and, above all, tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner" (Kikuchi, 1909; cited by Smith, 1983). Although women commonly worked in agriculture and textile industries, the Japanese cultural ideal told them to be housewives and homemakers. It's not surprising then, that Japanese women today are commonly viewed, perhaps stereotyped, as model housewives and homemakers.

Recent changes in the life cycle of the Japanese family may result in more employment of Japanese women outside the home. Delayed marriage, early childbearing, decreased fertility, a very short childbearing period, an extended postparental period, and increased longevity leave Japanese women with more years free of child-rearing responsibilities (Kumagai, 1984). Smaller families, modern child care and educational resources, and economic changes may provide increased freedom and motivation for mothers to be employed outside the home. Whether Japanese women seek employment outside the home and how satisfied they are with their life styles will be influenced by their attitudes and

beliefs regarding employment of women and potential effects on marriage and child development. Little is currently known about contemporary (as opposed to traditional) Japanese beliefs regarding women's employment. The purpose of this study is to assess Japanese men and women's beliefs and attitudes related to women's employment, and to analyze generational differences in terms of social change.

Method

A questionnaire was designed to assess attitudes and beliefs about men and women's work and family roles. The questionnaire included items that had been used in previous research (Engel, 1978, 1985, and 1986) on work/family roles. Items offered a Likert scale response format: strongly agree to strongly disagree. Questionnaires were pretested on American subjects, revised, and translated into Japanese. Then the Japanese version of the questionnaire was "back translated" (Brislin, 1980) into English and revised to maximize translation accuracy.

Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 900 Japanese adults. For purposes of comparison, respondents were categorized into two generations, a 20 to 39 year old "younger" generation and a 40 to 59 year old "older" generation, which roughly correspond to Levinson et. al.'s (1978) "early adulthood" and "middle adulthood" "eras" in the life cycle. The average age of younger generation respondents was 27, compared with 47 for

older generation respondents. The younger generation averaged 14.3 years of education compared with 13.5 for the older generation. The younger generation reported an average household size of 3.4 while the older generation reported 3.8 people in the household. Fifty-five percent of the younger generation were married, compared with 94 percent of the older generation. Twenty-three percent of the women in the younger generation considered themselves housewives compared with 59 percent of the older generation.

T-tests were used to test for significance of differences between younger and older age groups. The data on men and women were analyzed separately to control for effects of sex differences.

Results

The mean response to each attitude item by each group and the results of t-tests comparing younger and older generations of men and women are summarized in Table 1.

Japanese men and women of both generations tended to believe that while women are capable of handling the responsibilities of both home and career (item 1), they should not have to work outside the home unless they want to (item 3).

While both generations of Japanese men and women tended to be uncertain about whether or not wives' employment leads to marital difficulties (item 4), all groups tended to agree that

wives should not work outside the home when their husbands want them home (item 5).

While all groups agreed that mothers of infants should not work outside the home (item 8), and the older generation tended to feel the same way about mothers of older children (items 9 - 11), the younger generation indicated more uncertainty on this issue. It appears as though maternal employment, particularly when the child is more mature, may be becoming more acceptable in modern Japan.

While younger and older men were not found to differ significantly on any of the attitudes surveyed, younger and older women were found to differ significantly on 6 of 11 attitudes toward women's employment. Compared with the younger generation, the older generation of women showed a greater tendency to believe that they could be happy as full-time housewives (item 2), that married women should stay home to have and raise children instead of working outside the home (item 6), that maternal employment is likely to have harmful effects on children's development (item 7), and that a mother should not work outside the home when there is a preschool-aged (item 9), school-aged (item 10), or teen-aged (item 11) child in the family.

Discussion

Any conclusions or generalizations from the data of this

research should take into account that the nonrandom sample might not adequately represent Japanese society as a whole. The subjects tended to be primarily middle class. The older generation was not as well represented as was the younger generation. And no effort was made to control for marital or parental status.

It appears that younger generations of Japanese women, but not Japanese men, are less traditional in their attitudes toward women's employment than are older generations. Such differences could be selective effects of aging. That is, Japanese women could become more traditional as they age, while Japanese men do not. An alternative interpretation is that the attitudes of Japanese women are changing while those of men are not. Given dramatic changes in employment related attitudes and behaviors of women in other parts of the world, one might expect Japanese women to change in similar ways. To the extent that attitudes influence behaviors, we can expect to see increasing employment of women in Japan, and changes in Japanese society as people adjust to women being less available for house, child, and husband care.

Additional research is needed to determine whether intersex divergence (i.e., men and women are getting farther appart) in attitudes is occuring in contemporary Japan as it did in America a decade ago (Engel, 1978). To the extent that differences between Japanese men and women increase, Japanese families may experience more stress and conflict related to employment issues.

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TABLE 1: AGE COHORT DIFFERENCES IN JAPANESE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Attitude or Belief	Men			Women		
	20-39 yrs (n = 336) Mean	40-59 yrs (n = 80) Mean	t	20-39 yrs (n = 412) Mean	40-59 yrs (n = 58) Mean	t
1. Women are capable of handling both home and career.	3.44	3.54	-0.84	3.71	3.56	1.26
2. I could be happy as a full-time housewife-husbandhusband.	3.11	3.37	-1.94	2.93	3.45	-3.86***
3. A wife or mother should NOT work outside the home when she doesn't want to work outside the home.	3.58	3.53	0.48	3.61	3.65	-2.25
4. Difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife is employed outside the home.	3.35	3.36	-0.13	3.15	3.31	-1.23
5. A wife should NOT work outside the home when her husband wants her home.	3.67	3.67	0.00	3.55	3.81	-1.95
6. Married women should be home, having or raising children, instead of being employed outside the home.	2.97	3.01	-0.87	2.35	2.91	-3.94***
7. Maternal employment is likely to have harmful effects on children's development.	3.14	3.34	-1.69	2.83	3.24	-2.81**
8. A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is an infant in the family.	4.07	4.07	0.06	4.00	3.93	0.40
9. A mother should NOT work outside the home when there is a preschool-age child in the family.	3.67	3.75	-0.62	3.40	3.76	-2.44*
10. A mother should NOT work outside the home if there is a school-age child in the family.	3.49	3.56	-0.62	3.25	3.62	-2.60**
11. A mother should NOT work outside the home if there is a teenage child in the family.	3.47	3.55	-0.62	3.26	3.57	-2.22*

Note: Likert scale scoring, i.e., 1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "uncertain," 4 = "agree," and 5 = "strongly agree."
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001